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The effect of school choice on multilingual learners in New York City

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The Effect of School Choice on Multilingual Learners in New York City

By

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Abstract

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The New York City Department of Education has the responsibility of educating more than one million students from diverse backgrounds and various economic statuses. The department boasts school choice- allowing its public school students and their families to choose between magnet schools, charter schools, and their local neighborhood zoned schools. This paper uncovers how the multitude of school choices came to be in NYC, how it affects multilingual families, and potential solutions to the effects of school choice on multilingual families. This paper investigates why only 7% of charter school students are Multilingual Learners, while 15% of NYC Public School students are Multilingual Learners. This investigation also offers suggestions to administrators and school policymakers on how they can address the inequities that exist in the school choice process.

Table of Contents

Introduction

I was raised in a suburb of Syracuse, where everyone in my neighborhood went to the same elementary school, and everyone in the town went to the same middle, junior high, and high school. It was either that, or your family paid a pretty penny to send you to a private Catholic school.

Then, as I started my master's program in New York City, my eyes were opened to the world of school choice. The school where I was placed for my year of supervised fieldwork was a Magnet School, one of NYC's International High Schools, and students from all over Queens travelled up to an hour and 15 minutes to school each day. Soon, I started to learn more and more about the school choice process. I became part of the school's "recruitment committee." The staff at the school were concerned that their student population was becoming too Spanish speaking dominated, making the population too homogenous. Moreover, they were concerned that they were attracting Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education at an "alarming rate," and that this would cause their performance levels to go down. They started to think of ways to market their school, using recruitment videos and reaching out to middle school guidance counselors. I remember thinking about how odd it was that the school felt the need to market to a certain population. All the while, I was being fed information by colleagues, friends, and the media that charter schools were evil and were ruining public education.

Then, a global pandemic and a citywide hiring freeze landed me a job as an ESOL Teacher in a Charter High School in the Bronx. With the aspirations to form my

own perspective, I began to look deeper into what it means to be a charter school, and what charter schools mean for the rest of public education.

One major critique of school choice in New York City is that choice schools do not educate all student populations at the same rate as zoned schools. This paper will start with a brief history of school choice in NYC, discuss the gap in the Multilingual learner[1] population in Choice VS. Zoned schools, the impacts of this gap, and how we can address the gap at a school-wide and city-wide level.

[1] Throughout this paper, I will be using the term Multilingual Learner (MLL) to refer to students that speak a language other than English and have not yet reached commanding on the NYSESLAT.

Chapter 1: A Brief History of School Choice in NYC

> *They say that if you can make it in New York City, you will make it anywhere. If that is true for aspiring entertainers and businesspeople, it must also be true for schools. Because of its sheer enormity, diversity, and political intensity, New York City's educational battles cast many essential issues in American school reform in sharp relief. New York City schools exemplify the challenges urban districts face in financing, overseeing and staffing schools that work for children growing up in intense poverty. The number of students served by the city's school system is, in itself, reason to pay attention to New York City public schools.* (Lake, 2004, p. 7)

In December 1998, New York State passed the "New York charter schools act of nineteen hundred ninety-eight". This was a charter school law that allowed charter schools to be established throughout the state. They were the 36th state in the country to pass this law (Lake, 2004). This act took a few years to pass due to the fact that Democratic lawmakers linked with the NYSUT (New York State United Teachers) were skeptical of charter schools. They believed that charter schools would take attention and resources away from traditional public schools. However, early in 1998, constituents in inner-city communities urged legislators to pass the act, influencing the Legislature's Black and Hispanic caucus to support the Charter Schools Act. This pressure, combined with a Governor's threat to hold legislators' pay raises hostage, allowed the Charter Schools Act to be passed in 1998 (Lake, 2004).

This act noted that the purpose of the authorization of the system of charter schools was to, "provide opportunities for teachers, parents, and community members to establish and maintain schools that operate independently of existing schools and school districts in order to accomplish the following objectives:

(a) Improve student learning and achievement;

> (b) Increase learning opportunities for all students, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for students who are at-risk of academic failure;
>
> (c) Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods;
>
> (d) Create new professional opportunities for teachers, school administrators and other school personnel;
>
> (e) Provide parents and students with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system; and
>
> (f) Provide schools with a method to change from rule-based to performance-based accountability systems by holding the schools established under this article accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results." (NYS Charter School Center, 2012, p. 3)

Three years later, by the end of 2001, there were 18 charter schools serving students across New York City (Lessons of Hope, 2014). DOE Chancellors tried and failed to gain support for charter schools, and charter applicants were having difficulties finding start-up funds and adequate facilities for their schools. However, in 2002, Michael Bloomberg became mayor and swiftly took control over the NYC School System. He appointed Joel Klein as his Chancellor, who had no experience in the field of education and had a background as a corporate CEO and antitrust lawyer. Joel Klein came into the role as Chancellor dedicated to making the school system more equitable, even if that meant drastic overhaul of the programs in place (Klein, 2014). In his book, Lessons of Hope (2014), Klein states:

> ...when middle-class communities became disenchanted with the public schools in the 1980s, the city had responded by creating a substantial number of magnet

> schools and programs for higher-performing kids... These so-called screened schools and programs provided higher-performing kids with attractive new choices that kept many of them in the public school system. But nothing comparable was done for struggling students in the poorer communities. For them, the only hope was their neighborhood school, period. This, too, was neither fair nor equal (p. 35).

Klein believed that school choice was the way to provide equitable education to all city students, and to him, this meant that school choice should be widely available to students of all socio-economic backgrounds. Citing this inequity, and the low proportion of charter schools in NYC compared to other urban areas, Klein made it his mission to create an environment that allowed charter schools to grow and thrive in the city. He and Bloomberg recognized the potential for charter schools to, “infuse the school system with entrepreneurial energy and ideas and bring a unique combination of flexibility and accountability to a highly bureaucratic system” (Lake, 2004, p. 5).

Together with Bloomberg, he put his plan into motion by: allowing charter schools to use public spaces, centralizing the kindergarten registration through an online application that encouraged school choice, taking away attendance zones in 3 districts, and implementing the “new school movement” that broke large, “failing” schools, into smaller schools (Klein, 2014).

Klein and Bloomberg made a goal to open 50 charter schools in 5 years. In his book, Lessons of Hope (2014), Klein states,

> We began to target the most troubled schools for closure. Our plan was to phase out dozens of these failing high schools, eliminating a grade per year. Between

> four and six new smaller schools would replace each of the ones phased out, and these would be ramped up one grade at a time… All of these schools were to be “choice” schools, meaning that students would have to apply, rather than “zoned” facilities that they were forced to attend. As “choice” schools, the new schools would have to earn their students by offering good programs and increasing student performance (p. 77).

The Gates Foundation was a big supporter of the small school movement. Quickly after the support from the Gates Foundation, Joel Klein announced a ranked-order preference system for school choice. This rank-order choice system was modeled on the medical school residency admissions program. It required each student to list their rank-order preferences for up to 12 schools. Then, schools would rank students based on their admissions criteria. Admissions criteria from schools could include grades, geographic preferences, or random lotteries. A computer would then match students with schools. Klein acknowledged that this process may be difficult for some families but rationalized his decision by stating that this change would bring about a fair process to place students, replacing the system that benefited students and families that had personal connections (Klein, 2014). In his opinion, this ranked-choice voting system provides an equitable system of school choice and puts an end to only those that knew someone getting their way in the public school system (Klein, 2014).

Klein, a businessman, believed that competition and accountability were the cure to the ailing public education system. The framework for creating small schools of choice was demanding and competitive and was intended to encourage and allow many different types of stakeholders, from current educators to school reform organizations,

to start new schools. The school choice movement, however, is not without its critics, who oppose the idea that “market-like competition” is fit for schools (Ravitch, 2010).

Klein and Bloomberg’s school choice agenda was further supported by the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, which “connected choice with accountability” (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The No Child Left Behind Act cited that, “children in schools in need of improvement must be given the opportunity to transfer to other public schools in their district, including public charter schools, and school districts are required to tell parents about this option, as well as pay for transportation to the other schools” (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). This act gave families the agency to pull their children out of their failing local schools and enroll them in higher performing schools. By default, schools had to compete for enrollees, which put pressure on teachers and administrators to increase student performance. Also, the act specifically lists charter schools as an alternative to failing, zoned schools.

With the support of the new school movement and No Child Left Behind Act, there are currently 267 Charter Schools. 93 of these schools are in Brooklyn, 54 in Manhattan, 25 in Queens, 87 in the Bronx, and 6 in Staten Island. There are currently 135,902 students enrolled in these charter schools, which is 13% of NYC public school students. 79% of these students are economically disadvantaged, 18% are students with disabilities, and 7% are Multilingual Learners (New York City Charter Schools Center, 2021). However, Multilingual Learners make up more than 15% of the population of NYC Public Schools (New York City Department of Education Division of Multilingual Learners, 2019). The following chapters will discuss the reasoning behind this large discrepancy, the effects of this discrepancy, and ways to address this discrepancy.

Chapter 2: Why the Gap?

Are charter school applicants representative of all NYC students?

> *No. Charter schools tend to serve high-need students in high-need neighborhoods, including high percentages of poor and minority students. Unfortunately, many charter schools have not attracted and retained students with disabilities and English Language Learners at rates comparable to neighboring district schools, which state law now requires them to do. Charter schools take this responsibility seriously and are working to expand their outreach efforts (New York Charter School Center, 2021, Charter School Lotteries in New York City: Frequently Asked Questions section, para. 7)*.

Critics suggest that the underrepresentation of Multilingual Learners in charter schools is a product of charter schools' infamous practice of "counseling out" students that are most difficult to educate. "Counseling out" is the method in which some charter schools, directly or indirectly, make it known that a specific student is not welcomed or supported in their school, inevitably leading to the student leaving the charter school (Winters, 2014). However, research has found that multilingual elementary school students actually leave charter schools at a lesser rate than they leave traditional public schools and that multilingual middle school students leave traditional public schools and charter schools at the same rate (Winters, 2014). Additionally, in "non-gateway grades," those in which students do not tend to make structural moves, such as from second to third grade, multilingual students are more likely to enter charter schools than to exit them. These findings show that the "counseling out" practice is not a huge factor in the gap of MLL enrollment. Although this phenomenon may exist, MLLs are no more mobile (likely to leave) in charter schools than they are in traditional public schools, and so the "counseling out" phenomenon is not a driving factor in the gap (Winters, 2014).

So then, what does drive the MLL gap? Winters (2014) states that the main cause for the MLL gap is, “explained by the fact that ELL students are far less likely to apply to attend charter schools in gateway grades than non-ELL students” (p. 2). He goes further to state that those students with more limited English proficiency (at beginning levels) are even less likely to apply to charter schools during these gateway grades. Of all of the gateway grades, multilingual students (and their families) are least likely to apply to charter schools for kindergarten. The kindergarten year, in general, boasts the largest new enrollment into charter schools. Therefore, this discrepancy at the kindergarten level is the main factor in driving the gap in enrollment and stays consistent throughout children’s school careers (Winters, 2014).

It is clear that a barrier to school choice is evident in the application process. Williams (2019) states, “If charter schools are to offer a meaningful alternative to district schools, they must be accessible to all families— including multilingual families” (Improving Access to Charter Schools for English Learners section, para. 1). If families are lacking important information about charter school options or enrollment policies, they are not able to take advantage of these systems (Williams, 2019).

One of the most obvious reasons that school choice may present a barrier to multilingual families is the linguistic barrier. Families that speak a language other than English at home may have a range of comfort and facility with English (Williams, 2019). This makes it hard for families to interact with the information that they receive from schools or other institutions. Even though families may face this barrier in all education, the linguistic barrier in school choice essentially removes school choice altogether for

these families. The families are assigned to a zoned school without any knowledge of them being able to opt-out (Williams, 2019).

Beyond the obvious language barrier, there is also a barrier created but the lack of cultural literacy and cultural familiarity (Williams, 2019). For many native-born, urban Americans, school choice is not a foreign concept. However, for families that are new to the country and may not have experienced school choice in the country that they are from, school choice may not be on their radar. Additionally, immigrant families are less likely to have a social network of native-born American friends to expose them to school choice (Williams, 2019). In a study that surveyed Indianapolis charter school families, Latinx, African American, and white families all indicated that academic performance is the most important feature when looking into schools. However, Latinx families indicated, at a rate higher than the other two groups, that word of mouth was a very important part of deciding on a school. Although there are many Latinx families that are not Multilingual Learners, 61% of English Language Learners in New York City are native Spanish speakers (New York City Department of Education Division of Multilingual Learners, 2019), indicating that a majority of MLL families in New York City are Latinx. This may be another factor in Latinx MLL families' decision to stay within the schools of their social circle, which are primarily zoned schools.

Williams (2019) recognizes that “New York City’s Public School Performance Dashboard” has “valuable, specific data on English language acquisition progress and academic achievement information for ELs in every one of the city’s public schools” (Improving Access to Charter Schools for English Learners section, para 11). The pages compare schools’ performances across the city, providing families with valuable

information. Although this is a great practice, Williams (2019) explains that the page is potentially overwhelming, and that particular metrics may not be clearly visible. New York State's school report cards, on the other hand, are more accessible, but provide data that is a lot less specific on English language performance (Williams, 2019).

There are more barriers to school choice for families. For example, when families attend schools outside of their zone, they inevitably are signing up for a longer commute. This can be hard for single caretakers or caretakers with multiple jobs. Additionally, many choice schools may expect higher levels of parent engagement throughout the year, which presents another barrier to busy families. Even more, some zoned schools require families to pay out of their own pocket for uniforms or for after-school problems, which may be unattractive to low-income families (Mader, Hemphill & Abbas, 2018).

Chapter 3: Effects of School Choice

> *The logic of choice can be used for segregation or integration. But in either case, it puts the onus on individual parents to find good schools for their children, rather than on society as a whole to provide for the education of all children. Correcting the disparities across the school system as a whole and providing equitable educational opportunity to all families should be a collective effort by all members of the community with strong central leadership from City Hall and the Department of Education.* (Mader, Hemphill, Abbas, 2018, p. 28)

Even when policies explicitly make school choice available for everyone, national research documents that families with fewer economic and societal advantages are less likely to exercise school choice (Mader, et al. 2018). A study of New York City kindergarten applications that controlled for race, ethnicity, and other demographic characteristics, found that Multilingual Learners were 73 percent less likely to opt out of their zoned schools (Mader, et al. 2018). Additionally, families that are eligible for free lunch are 80% less likely to opt out of their zoned schools and practice school choice (Mader, et al. 2018). Parents' opportunities to advocate for their students are tied to parental formal education, race, wealth, and networks. Because of this, many claim that school choice is only making the rich richer (Harris & Katz, 2018).

According to Mader, et al. (2018), families that exercise school choice tend to move to schools with lower free lunch rates and higher performance. As a result, schools in high-income neighborhoods gain students from low-income neighborhoods, causing schools in low-income neighborhoods to struggle with enrollment. This pattern causes zoned schools in low-income neighborhoods to receive less per-pupil funding, which affects pay for teachers, enrichment activities, and other resources. Additionally, the students with the highest academic needs usually remain in their zoned schools,

forcing these zoned schools to have to do more work with less funding and support (Mader, et al. 2018). This becomes a vicious cycle that feeds into itself, as the more zoned schools are seen as failing, the more families opt-out. The remaining families find themselves in more segregated, struggling schools, where teachers and staff are expected to support high-needs students with little funding. Inevitably, Multilingual Learners that remain in zoned schools do not get the support that they need. Kirkland and Sanzone (2018) states,

> The undesirability of underfunded and mismanaged schools makes such schools also non integratable. Unless conditions are established where true integration can be achieved—integrability (i.e., structural conditions that might encourage diversity)—then it is unlikely that the integration of New York City schools will be realized. Much of the work of integratibility must be about shifting narratives, mindsets, policies, and practices, addressing the fundamental nature of such things as they have been patterned to reinforce the outcomes that have become so apparent in the data (p. 28).

This quote speaks directly to the cycle that is created from advantaged families opting out of the zoned schools. An additional argument for the integration of schools is that, “increasing diversity can increase equity in New York City schools and significantly decrease gaps in some significant student outcomes (such as high school graduation)” (Kirkland & Sanzone, 2018, p. 24). More integrated schools would support all learners.

Because of New York’s tragic history of racial redlining, housing segregation continues to exist throughout the city. It is a common assumption that since housing is segregated in New York City, and most elementary school students in the city have a

school zone assigned to them, schooling is segregated because housing is segregated. However, housing segregation is not completely to blame for the current segregation that exists in NYC schools. The practice of school choice means that the economic and racial diversity of the neighborhood is not reflected in their neighborhood schools. White families are much more likely to opt-out of their zoned schools in gentrifying neighborhoods and choose a school that is more racially and economically segregated (more white and middle class). This is especially prevalent in gentrifying areas, where school choice is practiced by about half of the population (Mader, et al. 2018). The schools in these neighborhoods, as a result, do not reflect the diversity of their neighborhood. Studies have shown that schools are more segregated when school choice is part of the equation (Mader, et al. 2018). Harris and Katz (2018) note that in historically Black neighborhoods that are undergoing dramatic gentrification, such as Bedford-Stuyvesant, Harlem, Fort Greene, and Crown Heights, fewer than 25 percent of children actually attend their zoned school.

Chapter 4: Addressing the Gap

“The opposite of segregation is not integration; the opposite of segregation is access.”

-(Kirkland & Sanzone, 2018, p. 33)

Due to the ever-growing popularity of charter schools in New York City, it is safe to say that school choice is not going anywhere anytime soon. Since school choice is here to stay, the best way to address the gap of the limited number of Multilingual Learners in choice schools is to take action at the school, community, and local government level.

In order to attract and retain more Multilingual Learners to choice schools, schools should speak to and welcome families in their home languages. In a study conducted in NYC schools, it was found that multilingual families in NYC “did not see school staff as involved partners in their high school choice process” (Williams, 2019). It would be easy for schools to incorporate their staff in the school choice process. For example, Amber Charter Schools assign “Spanish-speaking staff to recruitment sessions and school conversations about identifying ELs for additional supports” (Improving Access to Charter Schools for English Learners section, para. 5). During these sessions, these Spanish-speaking staff members work with Spanish-speaking families to introduce them to the school and let the families know what it means to be classified as an ELL (Williams, 2019). This is a practice that could not only benefit multilingual families practicing school choice, but all multilingual families.

Additionally, schools must make sure that the data they are providing multilingual families is both comprehensive and accessible. Too often, data is either one or the other. Williams (2019) explains that a study of school choice in New York City found

that, “providing middle-school students who speak a non-English language at home with targeted information about higher-performing high school options significantly changed their choices” (Improving Access to Charter Schools for English Learners section, para. 24). This starts with a written translation; but given some multilingual families may have low literacy in their home language, a written translation may not suffice. For this reason, schools should consider hiring multilingual staff to ensure that families are receiving comprehensive information through multiple mediums. One charter high school located in The Bronx, for example, chooses to market itself via the radio in the languages spoken in its community.

Another way to ensure that families are receiving comprehensive education about school choice through multiple mediums is by partnering with community organizations, specifically community organizations that work with immigrant communities. As Williams (2019) states, “many of these organizations have the cultural knowledge and linguistic competencies to help multilingual families access information about charter school options. These organizations are also likely to have a more sophisticated understanding of social networks within immigrant and multilingual communities than many policymakers and charter leaders do” (Improving Access to Charter Schools for English Learners section, para. 22). Williams (2019) argues that charter schools working intentionally and respectfully with community organizations can ensure that their recruitment efforts are effective. Since the Latinx community values word of mouth from those that they are close to, community organizations can be especially helpful. In some areas, there are already organizations that exist that support students and families in navigating the school choice system.

An example of a community-based organization that supports multilingual families in the school choice process is “EdNavigator.” EdNavigator is an organization that works directly with families in Boston and New Orleans. EdNavigator hires staff with multilingual and multicultural competencies to accommodate families in navigating the school choice lotteries and enrollment process (Williams, 2019). Education leaders could work with multilingual community organizations to generate a list of charter schools that have demonstrated success serving Multilingual Learners.

Schools should also look to elementary schools or middle schools in their area to recruit students in gateway grades. Guidance counselors in elementary and middle schools often help students with the school choice process and are a big factor in educating students and families on how to fill out the ranked-choice voting system. Some middle schools, for example, suggest that their multilingual students partake in the school choice system, recommending that their students attend International High Schools or schools with dual language bilingual programs. At times, schools recruiting students will reach out to guidance counselors to encourage them to recommend their school to students.

DiMartino and Jessen (2014) emphasize that with the increased marketization of schools comes the need for branding and marketing. They state, “The branding decisions a school makes—from the name, to the official theme, to decisions about gender enrollment—affect how parents and prospective students perceive the school and, in turn, who decides to enroll” (p. 448). Schools can use this branding and marketing to their advantage in order to attract multilingual families. In fact, some schools have already made the education of Multilingual Learners central to their

models. They may do this by instituting dual language bilingual classrooms, or “Language Academies” after school or on the weekends to support multilingual students and their families (Williams, 2019). If schools are dedicated to attracting and retaining English Language Learners, centralizing English language learning and multiculturalism as an asset is essential to focus on (Williams, 2019).

Oftentimes, it is hard to attract Multilingual Learners to a charter school when many families feel attracted to International High Schools or dual language bilingual schools that are also in the neighborhood. This is the case at the previously mentioned charter high school in The Bronx, which has a hard time recruiting ELLs at a ratio that reflects the district that they are in (personal communication, April 1, 2021). Schools needing to recruit more multilingual families should look to state and national governments for support or school grants to start and maintain successful dual language bilingual programs (Williams, 2019).

Additionally, choice schools in New York City can give enrollment preferences to English Language Learners (personal communication, March 9, 2021). This means that if English Language Learners do apply, they will automatically be admitted. New York City does have a common application for charter schools so that families can apply to many charter schools at the same time. However, not all charter schools use this application, causing interested families to have to find and complete several different applications. Other non-charter choice schools have different applications as well. It is in a school's best interest to mainstream their application process as much as possible and make it accessible to all families.

It is also within policymakers' best interest to hold choice schools accountable for serving all learners. When charters are applying for charter renewal, a major factor that is considered by the renewing agency is, "The means by which the charter school will meet or exceed enrollment and retention targets as prescribed by the board of regents or the board of trustees of the state university of New York, as applicable, of students with disabilities, English language learners, and students who are eligible applicants for the free and reduced-price lunch program" (NYS Charter Schools Act, 1998, p. 6) These targets are developed by the chartering agencies. The NYS Charter Schools Act of 1998 states,

> When developing such targets, the board of regents and the board of trustees of the state university of New York shall ensure (1) that such enrollment targets are comparable to the enrollment figures of such categories of students attending the public schools within the school district, or in a city school district in a city having a population of one million or more inhabitants, the community school district, in which the charter school is located; and (2) that such retention targets are comparable to the rate of retention of such categories of students attending the public schools within the school district, or in a city school district in a city having a population of one million or more inhabitants, the community school district, in which the proposed charter school would be located" (p. 6).

Charter schools are under major pressure not only to educate, but to enroll and retain Multilingual Learners. If a school does not meet this goal, their charter may not be renewed. However, this is not a perfect science. Another charter high school in The Bronx, for example, shared that they struggle to maintain a percentage of 10% ELLs, a

number reflective of the local school district (personal communication, April 2, 2021). They have admissions priority for ELLs, so every ELL that enters the lottery is guaranteed admission. Even so, they find it difficult to attract and recruit English Language Learners and are consistently wavering on the 10% line. They say this is in part because of the location of their school. The district that they are held to the standard of is split in half by a highway. The charter school is on the opposite side of where most of the multilingual families live. Many students do not wish to cross the highway in order to go to school. This makes it hard for the school to recruit multilingual families, yet they are still held to a standard of district that they are disjointed from due to a highway.

According to Kirkland & Sanzone (2018), “the most selective of the nine specialized high schools in NYC are also among the City’s least diverse schools, with enrollments grossly overrepresented by Asian, White, and more economically advantaged students.” These specialized schools are providing opportunity monopolies to those students that already have the most advantage. It is clear that citywide policies must be adapted to correct this pattern, as the students that get access to these specialized high schools also get access to the best colleges in the nation, among material resources, enhanced curriculum, and other forms of social capital. In the end, the accessibility of these specialized schools is perpetuating the “Rich get Richer” phenomenon. Kirkland & Sanzone (2018) suggest that the city should break up these monopolies by, “using different criteria for selecting students into its specialized high schools.” One way of doing this, Kirkland & Sanzone (2018) suggest, is by “selecting students into its specialized schools based on neighborhood or district pools.” For

example, a specialized high school could take the top 10% of students per district across NYC, with consideration made for race and socioeconomic status. This would ensure that the top specialized high schools are creating equitable access to admissions (Kirkland & Sanzone, 2018).

Conclusion

In order to have a truly equitable school system based on school choice, students and families need to have equal access and education around school choice. The main reason for the gap in the percentages of Multilingual Language Learners between choice schools and zoned schools is caused by the lack of education and outreach surrounding school choice in New York City. Although frequently criticized for "creaming" or "counseling out" students that are in need of the most support, there is no clear evidence that this is happening for Multilingual Learners in choice schools. In fact, Multilingual Learners are more likely to transfer into a charter school from a zoned school than they are to exit a charter school to attend a zoned school.

There are many things that schools may do to support the enrollment of multilingual families. Schools should use community-based organizations, multilingual staff members, and accessible applications in order to improve their MLL enrollment. Cities and states should hold charter schools accountable to meeting at least the proportion of multilingual students in the district. However, cities and states must also support schools in recruiting and maintaining multilingual learners.

There is still much more work to be done to make "choice" schools truly a choice for all students. Without accessible choices for all families and students, school choice is incapable of meeting its original promise of equity. Schools should continue providing outreach and marketing themselves to multilingual families, and local governments should conduct more research to determine how to best support Multilingual families in the school choice process.

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